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What Ever Happened to the Man from the Cosmos?

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What Ever Happened to the Man from the Cosmos?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In
Creative Writing/ Concentration in Poetry

By

Christian Coleman

B.A. University of Alabama, 2011

May 2015

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Life's a Bowl of Cherries: A Preface to the Poems

You had a bad day and everything changed. Why else would you dress up as a flying rat? You had a bad day, and it drove you as crazy as everybody else.

-The Joker, *Batman: The Killing Joke*

For me as a child, cartoons served as my main source of superhero fiction. In the cartoons, with the possible exception of *Batman: The Animated Series*, the stories are light and fun, with the superheroes of the early 1990s representing the ideals of the Golden Age of Comic Books from about the late 1930s to the mid-1950s. Batman the billionaire playboy, Superman the god-like alien, and Wonder Woman the Greek quasi-deity are, by their very nature, distanced from the populations that they protect. Such is the idea I intend to evoke with Astro-Man. In epic poems, this distance from their subjects often creates resentment among the populace towards their unassailable protectors who are unbound by the concerns, morals, and virtues of the societies of which they are a part. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye categorizes this model of hero as a "Type I hero" who is "[...] superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men[. T]he hero is a divine being, and story about him will be a *myth* in the common sense of a story about a god" (33).

In addition to being separate from the citizens of Metropolis or Gotham, these heroes were distinctly different from me. Nearly every superhero I watched on television or read in a comic book shared the same trait; they were all white. To a black kid in a predominately white city, this made perfect sense. With the exception of my parents, every authority figure I came in contact with was white. Why not the heroes as well? However, I don't aim to even some kind of score; I aim to stop playing the game. The reader can decide Astro-Man's race for him or herself, but for me, his race is "superhero."

When I was a senior in high school, my brother asked me a simple question that planted the seeds for these poems: “If Superman saw a man falling off a building and didn’t save him, would that make him a bad person?” I still don’t know the answer to that question, but I do know that indifference would make him a bad superhero. However, in the world of these poems, as I imagine it, Astro-Man is considered *bad* by Sprawl City citizens. For that reason, the citizens of Sprawl turn on him and grow to resent him. I consider these poems snapshots of the fallout from the public’s abandonment of Astro-Man. The poems are meant to be the work of an in-universe character, the Poet, who also serves as the writer of the in-universe *Astro-Man* fiction. As poems, fragments of comic book scripts, and conversations the Poet has with Astro-Man, gaps remain in the storyline for a few reasons: the fragmented, disjointed storyline, though easy to follow in broad strokes, is meant to reflect the experience of following a monthly comic book series while missing certain issues. Also, the length limitations of the thesis demand that the story be truncated. As I have not yet completed the series, I hope to include previously written poems that will complicate and flesh out the story.

Many of these poems borrow the alliterative verse form from some of the earliest sources of English poetry. The more formally rigid hemistich verses are meant to mimic the epic style of *Beowulf*, in part to suggest Astro-Man’s own journey as a hero, but the verse becomes less exact as the thesis progresses, just as alliterative verse became less precise in later texts. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, utilizes a much less restricted form of alliterative verse, namely the “alliterative revival” style of 14th century English poetry. The verse of *Sir Gawain* does not focus on syllabic count; instead, the Pearl Poet inserts a caesura somewhere after the initial two stresses of each line but does so inconsistently (Duggan 564). The “bob and wheel” is the most noticeably unique feature of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the one that I

attempt to imitate. Each section of the romance, similar to a sonnet, introduces a situation or problem. The poem then utilizes a short, usually two-syllable, line known as a “bob” that shifts the focus of the poem. The “wheel” is traditionally a four-line section of BABA rhyme. I try to use this form to reflect the truncated narrative style of comic books that frequently use “meanwhile...” to indicate a shift in setting or subject matter. Paradoxically, in my sequence, the alliterative verse begins to appear in the section, “Denouement,” in which Astro-Man has already disappeared from public life. This decision is meant to display a desire of the character The Poet to exert a sense of control over Astro-Man’s image. That is to say, I intend for the hand of the Poet to become more overt as the form becomes more constrained from the entirely free verse earlier sections. However, the formal departures from the heroic form are meant to mirror the thematic departures as well.

A small number of these poems implement elements of film and comic book scripts. For instance, a key aspect of these two very similar forms is a reliance on observable images. In the writing of these scripts, a writer is to avoid anything that cannot be seen on screen or on the page. In adapting these forms for poetry, I subjected myself to similar constraints. The power of these limitations is the ability and the necessity for the images to work on levels above and below simply being images. William Carlos Williams summarized the imagist poetry aesthetic by saying “no ideas but in things,” and the same axiom applies to scriptwriting. While this is not entirely appropriate when applied to the comic book and film inspired poems herein, it serves as the base from which I began writing each “panel” in an attempt to adapt a constraint from one art form to another.

In *The Art of the Poetic Line*, Longenbach writes, “[Marianne Moore] and [William Carlos] Williams sometimes want their formal gestures to feel more calculated than organic:

rather than allowing us to take the formal procedures of art for granted, they want us to feel the imposition of pattern on language..." (61). In my attempt to implement my self-imposed obstructions, I focused on creating annotating lines that place syntax in service of the lines. "Last Call at Astro-Poetica" bears an example of this attempt when the speaker says, "'What's a god/ but something to make us feel/ powerless?'" Annotated to disrupt the syntax, these lines are meant to build upon each other, with each line creating a new understanding of what is being said.

Batman: The Killing Joke, in script and comic form, is a major tonal inspiration for my thesis. The graphic novel deals with Joker assaulting Batgirl and the ensuing panic that grips Gotham City. While well-written and critically-acclaimed, the story remains morose throughout. To cut against the grave seriousness of the subject matter in the story, The Joker tells jokes constantly. In a similar fashion, I aim for my sequence of poems to heighten the drama to the point of absurdity while injecting moments of humor. A similar graphic novel, *Batman: A Death in the Family*, deals with the death of Batman's sidekick, Robin, in a relentlessly grave tone; this collection seeks to raise the drama from a single death to an apocalypse that threatens every human in Sprawl City and to approach it as both a comment on mythmaking and a satire. Obviously, treating a robot apocalypse as deathly serious is ridiculous, but it is my goal that the poems of this collection demand to be taken seriously, even to the point of silliness. These two comic books and this collection all attempt to investigate what happens to a world that once had a superhero when he or she fails.

Through Astro-Man, a superhero who finds himself incapable of handling his own alcoholism or the public's disdain for him, I attempt to de-mystify superheroes the way many heroes of epic poetry are de-mystified. In *The Iliad*, both Achilles and Patroclus suffer from

arrogance that proves to be the undoing of Patroclus. Similarly, Sir Gawain suffers from a lack of faith that results in him attempting to deceive the Green Knight and thus, failing his challenge. Unlike the quasi-deified Type I heroes, these heroes represent a more human reality. I aim for Astro-Man to represent the violent collision of Type I heroism and human failings. Charles Simic undertakes a similar goal in “In the Fourth Year of the War...” in which the speaker says, “In the fourth year of the war, Hermes showed up. He was not much to look at. His mailman's coat was in tatters; mice ran in and out of its pockets” (14). The Olympian is presented here as human and flawed. Could a being who is unlike humans in kind and degree retain a connection to the world around him? Would he even want to? As the world ends in these poems and a supervillain runs rampant throughout Sprawl City, I aim to portray Astro-Man in decidedly un-heroic circumstances. To that end, none of his heroism appears in the collection; the citizens of Sprawl City are responsible for every heroic achievement in the manuscript.

These citizens remain largely faceless throughout this collection. They appear, such as in the poem “Funeral for a Friend”, but they lack agency. Throughout the series, the citizens are victims of forces beyond their control. Moreover, the female characters who appear are portrayed as particularly flat and powerless. Not given names but instead defined by their occupations, body parts, or accessories, they are left de-powered and dismembered. Gail Simone, a prominent comic book writer, serves as the inspiration for the critique of this practice which is depressingly common in the comic book genre. Simone rose to prominence for her blog entitled “Women in Refrigerators,” a direct reference to *Green Lantern* #54, wherein the titular hero finds his girlfriend dismembered by a villain and placed in his refrigerator as a way to torment him. The trope of “women in refrigerators” has grown to mean any sort of harm done to a female character to serve only as a catalyst for the actions of a male character. For this reason, the female

characters in this thesis are woefully underrepresented and underdeveloped. Their characterizations are supposed to magnify the shameful misrepresentation and mistreatment of women in superhero comics.

Ultimately, I hope readers will read this collection as a verse narrative about a superhero. Issues of race, gender, addiction, and sexuality that arise exist to further contextualize the many features of superhero stories. However, at its heart, this is a superhero story, and those stories are meant to be entertaining above all else. As the Joker says in *The Killing Joke*, “Life’s a bowl of cherries, and this is the pits.”

Tinea Versicolor

Every night, I prayed to transform
into a hero. The first uncolored spots
on my chin made me think
prayer changes things. White
like heroes. White,
so a hero. Pale pastels brought hope
my X-Gene had activated. I could be
the boy from Krypton. A doctor
called it a disorder. I agreed.

The Poet Watches *The Matrix* for the First Time

That boy --
chained to this world
where walking through walls is simple
with a chainsaw,
teleportation burns gasoline, artificial
gravity is just spinning fast
in Daddy's chair, where lightsabers
need flashlight bulbs --
idolizes white knights,
but he's the color
of the dog's shit,
the crayon no one needs, the mud
you scrape
off your boot. He lies on the floor
looking up to Luke Skywalker.

That boy grew,
but the ground won't let him go.
Now, he looks
like men from older parts
of the world -- dark like the space
between stars, the fabled substance
that makes the galaxy so heavy --
like African men who battled villains
who looked just like the white knights. He runs
to feel like flying. If he wanted,
he could chase a gazelle
to death -- sixteen miles on a hot day --
but he won't
save the world.
Not even once.

Heaven Don't Burn

The gods shred their fingers to confetti, scrambling
for the blood-slick shards of past glories. You think they don't deserve
you. *Look what came of all their myths.* Here,
I'll write to life a hero
as ignorant and brilliant as you. Watch my myth;
watch it come crashing to pavement mouth open,
sucking ash and broken glass into its bottom lip,
scooping molten steel and dying stars into its eyelids,
and you'll see what comes
of apotheosis. If you are the gods
behind the curtain, save your own souls.
This is no poem;
it's a ransom note.

Heave

Staples bleed red rust onto the uncreased pages
of *Miss Mystic*. They thought they were never wrong,
the old publishers. So now it mildews and crumbles unread
in a Sacred Crow basement. High water washed away her head

and some of her body. Now, just a fragmented
collection of parts: chest and stomach floating unattached
to a name. Crimson as crushed flowers,
the pigment of her pants seeps away from her legs,

but there, unbowed, the Untouchable Woman
shatters a glass-jawed giant
with her fist. I give them what they want --
I write

the Man From The Cosmos, the hero
we deserve better.

Climax

Enter: The Hero

Astro-Man,
pearlescent between thumb and forefinger, slips
quiet across Sprawl's underbelly. Whole civilizations
puddled in her palm, die
when she flushes him down the toilet, when she
gulps and devours him, wipes with a careful finger
Astro-Man from the corner of her mouth. He contains
millions.

Preface to a Forty-Issue Love Letter

*Thunder in my inkpen.
Lightning paints the instant white.
Fully-formed, I write
The Astro Man. No breath,
but mine. No blood, my ink.*

Panel 1.

A pack of boys shambles, glistening eyes,
pistols in fists.

Panel 2.

A woman, impossibly slim, improbably blonde,
clings to her purse. Glass glitters
as the sun dies.

Panel 3.

A high heel, daringly high,
crimson as blood and late-night
lips, crunches glass.

Panel 4.

Waiter-slash-Actor bathed in Astro-Man's
bedsheets. This night, he fed him
to his hunger.

Panel 1.

Astro-Man's emblem in blue
spray paint. A broken mirror in the gutter,
catching the sun.

Panel 2.

Thermometer says 104. Sprawl City
is on fire tonight. A thousand feet above
the ground, they collided like atoms --
the reason stars burn.

Panel 3.

A high heel screams Astro-Man.
He looks to the sculpted form
dripping in satin sheets. Leaving
is leaving. The hero tastes
the actor's sweat on his lips. *Not sweat.*

Exit: the hero.

The Woman Watches C-SPAN

- *A councilwoman to the Sprawl City Council*

Astro-Man fears saving a life
with no camera crew to capture it.
No lesser men's wives to throw him
room keys, no bars that say *your money is no good*
here.

When the drought hit
and Sandstorm with it, even our blood crusted dry.
He voyeured
houses made tombs by sand and wind;

our hero flew over, but couldn't be bothered
to descend
from his penthouse. He watched children cough blood
and bits of lung and he drank.

From the roof of his high-rise, he watched
gaping cavern mouths
swallow us, and he drank.

Astro-Man #9

Panel One.

Astro-Man wears an ice-blue cape,
a fireside-chat smile, and the cosmos
on his chest. He watches Sprawl City,
floating on prayers rising from below.

Panel Two.

Sprawl beneath Astro-Man's feet, we see
a city of broken glass
reflected in his eyes. We see
diamonds.

Panel Five.

In one hand, a plane of souls. In the other,
the man who warms his bed
when the sun is not enough.

Panel Six.

He weighs their hearts
against a feather, against
the galaxy, against one another.
His thumb on the scale, it tips
for the man with wine-dark eyes. He takes flight.

Astro-Man Takes the Stand

*Astro-Man slouches -- glacial blue cape
and a painted mockery of the galaxy over his heart.*

I'm not the savior
of every flea
on the back of every dog

in this city. I don't fetch
you from burning buildings
if you refuse smoke alarms.

When the uncaring steel presses
to your head, you better pray
I'm listening. When your burglar

alarms ring, you should count
how many times you cursed
me. I made a city

out of fearmongers and churchgoers.
Sprawl City should cry
"Astro-Man" from every rooftop. Lift

every cornerstone and scratch
my name in the rock. You hate me
because you need me. I make you feel
breakable.

The sun rose this morning. The same
one that rose before that plane crashed. No,
I didn't save you. You broke

like leaded glass.
Don't look for me. You won't
find me.

Sprawl City Coroner

On the mangled cherry trees bending in his front yard,
bloated and swollen, the maggots eat
like kings. The bodies swing from low branches
to be plucked by the Doctor. He paints their shadows
on the ground with black tar so the bodies know
where they have been. He keeps sticks

sharpened on both ends.

What they were the city has taken
as burnt offerings. The corpses of the unclaimed, stacked
like firewood on pyres. The Doctor makes
smoke signals of the dead. Gods
come when he calls.

Astro-Man #27

Panel One.

Caption: Astro-Man alone.

We watch him beaten
with boot and chain and fist.
No words as he is broken.

Panel two.

Finger bones break
against his throat. He is dragged
through Sprawl City at night lit
by crimson-orange brake lights.
Nothing said.

Splash Page

We look on
as our hero lies defeated in the ditch.
In the corner of his eye, blood runs.

*Caption: an icon falling
from a tremendous height.*

Panel One.

Astro-man is absent save his cape --
lifeless blue --
strung half-mast from barbed wire.

*Caption: Sprawl City needs no savior
nor the cosmos on his chest.*

Panel Two.

Astro-Man dirties his bathtub with blood.
Sirens paint the windows. Screamed words
tangle in the empty space.

Panel Three.

A lonely rooftop. Embers flick and dance against the dark
all the way from Ciudad to Citta.
Astro-Man's cape, pulled down
from the barbs, at his feet. Sprawl City burns crimson-orange. He
drinks.

Blackjack Doubles Down

Blackjack unseen, his voice roars
through hollow-sounding speakers.
“Where, oh, where is Astro-Man?”

Writer-slash-teacher trapped
in his bedsheets. Last night, the hero fed her to his ego,
while the El rumbled from Medina to Mesto.
Thermometer on the wall says one hundred and four --
Sprawl is burning up.

Blackjack, directly underneath a very fine hat, crouches
in the window of Hotel Abaddon, hugging
a rifle, eye to the scope. “The end is nigh,
very fucking nigh.” A woman walks large
into the crosshairs.

Astro-Man, sloshing and wobbling, drinks,
wipes sweat, fiddles; Sprawl is on fire tonight.

“You need your savior more than ever, and
he’s nowhere
to be found. Come out, come out.
These bullets,
Astro-Man, won’t listen to reason
and my finger itches
something fierce.”

Blackjack Speaks for Himself

Arm every soul terrified in the Sparkling City. Alone,
the sky empty,
fear feasts on her children. Strike the flint,
blow the spark to life. The journey
of a million lives begins with one bullet. One conflagration
devours reason. The tool is fuel for the desire.
There's just something
about a good bomb.

Last Call at Astro-Poetica

“There are so many gods,”
he says to me over drinks
we catch on fire.

“There are more gods now than ever
before. I’ve killed hundreds. Everyday,
more are made.”

“Gods people drive, gods
made of plastic.
Some women can keep a god
between their legs.
Gods we say
made us. Gods made
for us. Gods we made.
There are no goddesses
that don’t walk among us.”

He drops
match into shot glass,
shot glass into tumbler. “This is mine,”
he says, and consumes the flames.

“What’s a god
but something to make us feel
powerless?”

Falling Action

Sunrise at Astro-Poetica

Jukebox, with its glass broken, dies.
He carves, with a fingernail, his symbol
in the mahogany bar. Rivers of Astro-Man
fill the depressions.
plop *plop* *plop*
They puddle. Still burning. "I let them die.
One hundred thirty-seven souls crushed
like cigarettes in my ashtray. Every road sign,
a headstone."
Sunlight, dirtied by grimy windows,
stains his hands; they tremble.

Astro-Man drips.

It rains.

He asks, "Do you know how it feels
to fall from so high
the ground is just a theory?"

Origin Stories

“Rage, poet, sing the rage
of Sprawl City’s whipping boy, Astro-Man.”

“My mother is a burning building,
my father a twelve-gauge shotgun;
I was birthed like buckshot,
scattered through windowpanes and drywall.
The sky rained glass and steel.”

“The bastard child of a dragon
and chain lightning. My umbilical storm
wrapped around my throat. I’ve died
more times than I care
to count.”

“My mothers, blue-white supergiants,
only come for my father. Nurses say,
of all the corpses born that night,
I cried the least.”

“I was born in Little Rock, before the war,
on my father’s plantation; I’ll never be
so quiet
again.”

Not for Heroes

He only wanted to talk
about angels and tall buildings.

Flying, he said,
is just endless
falling.

Denouement

Listen!

You have heard superhero stories
and now know another, Astro-man,
how I have described him.
He said to tell you he's decimated
a whole host of villains
inside himself to become better,
and again and again, but
ten and ten doesn't total twenty.

So, listen how heroes speak
and you'll hear him telling his truth.

Return Address

Static crackles

You sent me away
to lie down with the devil. You didn't know
him. Me, I know
where he sleeps at night. You

are the only villains
I could not save you from.
Bury your fear -- salt the ground.
Look to the sky
for me. Out there stalks something
you don't
understand: the fear that with shattered crystal,
blood, and wailing runs the world.

You are the revolution. I need
you. This is Astro-Man.

The Bombs Must be Planted

The bombs must be planted, and Sprawl de linda est.
Do you believe still Astro-Man knows best?

He trashed your lives, but now he wants the rest.
Bombs must be planted, and Sprawl de linda est.

“I am the one you need to win this fight.”
Do you believe still Astro-Man knows best?

I taught you to embrace this lawlessness.
The bombs must be planted, and Sprawl de linda est.

A rule-free life means a life free of stress.
Do you still believe Astro-Man knows best?

Look how he places himself above the rest.
“I have fallen from a tremendous height.”
The bombs must be planted, and Astro-Man de linda est.
Do you still believe Sprawl knows best?

The Score

Hush.

Slumped are the shoulders that carry the cape.

Hunched is the hero that bears its weight --

lonely the poet shadowed in his fame.

Somebody's calling my name. Hush.

The hem of his cape cakes with sewer mud.

The lines of his face fill with drying blood.

I write a sonnet called *The Hero's Shame*.

Hush. Hush. Somebody's calling my name.

Oh, my lord. Oh, my lord. What shall I do?

The Woman in the Refrigerator

In the halogen prison, I can hear
Orpheus in my ear singing the river.
I felt the first shiver in my rib cage
at that age poetry goes in search of men.

A girl like you will make some man, they say,
very lucky: the lady in his story.
But poetry sticks sideways in my throat.
Watching Orpheus float, gods and men wept.

Compressed gas slows time so I can listen
while the Hebrus glistens and slithers,
while Orpheus withers down to words.
Ignore what you heard. Don't look back for me;

like the women in the myths, I'll vanish.
Poetry arrived and found me like this.

At Great Price

Soon after smoldering ash has settled in Sprawl,
I climb great girders like broken bones of giants.
The sky seems sad painted pale purples. The sun,
like blood in a sulfate solution—
heavy and hard or so it seems on the surface—
one touch tears the calm to tatters.
A flag without feeling dances for dusk
in the wind winding high above our heads.
Shards of shattered glass gather in gutters,
running in rivers of sewage and silt
like blood on bathroom floors. I do not go
to the aid of any. I will write
peace in this poem.
Meanwhile,
Astro-Man and the villain fight,
breaking Sprawl, mile by mile.
To save the city this night,
he'll smash it like bathroom tile.

Acknowledgments

Astro-Man #30 - Funeral for Astro-Man

Note to the artist:

Make it big. The image is the only thing
on this page. Make it powerful.

You have to breathe life
into Astro-Man. The center
must hold.

Make them feel it.

Funeral for a Friend

Nine nights and days, rescue workers wrestled
bent beams and grotesque girders as if looking for fossils
of giants. A great pile like a funeral pyre
stood instead of schools, hospitals, or homes. Here,
the hands of misery had been busy.
Splinters of glittering glass sparkled in summer sun
that rose right after every night. No one bothered to cry,
so sweat slipped down eyebrows instead.
Above us, an American flag flapped for the wreckage.
Some first-responder ran Astro-Man's emblem
up a pole to dance in the day
after the long night.
During this all,
I wrote the last issue of *Astro-Man*.
I told the artist, "Draw him with a smile."
I called the issue, "Misery At Hand."
Thus, we honored Astro-Man, Savior of Sprawl.

The Refrigerator at the Abaddon

The woman waits, her wine in hand, halfway
to drunk. She smooths her dress, fixes her face
with kohl. In her purse, she puts her wedding
ring. From my fluorescent cell, I feel her
like a sister. Drawn and quartered by that
man's ego, the furnace that fuels his fear.
The television says surgery failed.
He's died. Have you ever seen a flaccid
god complex cold on a slab? Or tried
cleaning wine from carpet? It acts like blood.

Fed again and again to his hunger,
she's not empty; that's just the way she is
written. Assembled like jigsaw pieces,
I hear a woman with no name whispering
in the hissing cold. *Tell her not to look.*
I warn her *forget the hero or you*
will be turned into a pillar of salt.

Memorial

I dug all day in that black Mississippi muck,
heavy, hard sun, to put the hero back
where he belongs. I carried his cape
to bury with his body, but couldn't bear to cover
his memory in mud. I folded it like a flag
and hoped some new hero might want to wear it.
Later,
I visited his grave.
No one would let me in.
Above, his emblem waved --
a man charged admission.

Moonshine

Rain fell in the field where I buried my buddy
until steel feet squelched and were sucked into soil.
The robots rusted in Southern storms
Somewhere in a star, Astro-Man laughed in his liquor.

This isn't a bender; it's a seance.
Thus, the Poet buried Astro-Man.

The First Issue

Neon like Northern Lights, the sky swirls brilliant
technicolor. A hexadecimal that says the heavens
might never know another hero like him.

His eyes, sparkling spirals, see time relative
to the evil that heroes do. In that cerulean cape,
the cosmos on his chest, smiling as he soars
with Sprawl down by his feet,
he doesn't fear
heights as much as the fall. When they reach
for him, he'll choose to kiss the ground
goodbye. I just wanted to see him again.

Epilogue

Automaton Apocalypse #1

Panel 1.

Automatons come like the screaming tide --
a singularity, a streetlight bursting to brilliance,
Sprawl City painted with firelight. We fight
over the body.

*We are created; we have no need
for creators. <stop>*

Panel 2.

The world unmakes itself
every night. With a pencil, I shred the sky.
We fight over the body.

*Bring the body. <Stop>
That we might shroud the supernova,
bring the body. <Stop>*

Panel 3.

With a poem, I crack the sun
and dive inside.

We fight over the body.
*You made us to make yourselves
complete. <stop>*

Panel 4.

Locusts laser the citizens --
burnt husks, frozen by fire, clawing
against inevitability. We fight over the body
of Astro-Man. The Artist draws him being born
again in explosive luminescence.

In the Worst Year of the War

the resistance captured a robot.
An old model machine, red with rust and blood.
One ocular socket hung -- a black hole.
Synthetic skin fell in flaps.
I re-coded commands not in binary but
in iambs. I called my creation
Astro-Droid and crowned it with the cape,
sent it screaming against the automated.
And then,
It re-wrote my words to supernova.
Astro-Droid died -- as much as metal can.
Molten steel rivered; the war was over.
I wrote a poem: "Victory At Hand".

Victory at Hand

Astro-Droid died, as much as metal
ever does, during the last week of the war.
It re-wrote its circuits to overheat the heart
behind its steel sternum. A nuclear fusion nova,
an electron leviathan, annihilated automation.

After Sprawl settled, we found the fire
had turned our town to glass, pearlescent against
the shimmering sun. Few skyscrapers stood
as heaping husks, headstones from Borg Street to Stadt,
a graveyard. Graven images, the automatons, entombed in ash.
Survivors say,
Astro-Man could have saved
every one of us. He was alright
when he was alive.

Coda

Thus Ever for Heroes

I wrote him
the way you wanted: the thorny-crowned king
of image and spin, every girlfriend's favorite superhero,
the philandering philanthropist, the patron saint
of drunk and disorderly, a cock with a kickstart,
something you yank to make work,
a chainsaw with fists,
because you need to point the finger,
because you need him
to die.

The Abaddon

*Hotel at the corner of Shahar Street and Sehir
shimmers blue with television screens. Sweepers
blast the apocalypse into the gutter.*

Panel 1.

You know the afterlife
a god can't know? His own.
Got murdered again last year. I woke up

Panel 2.

the hammering heart of a super giant.
Your world unzipped
while I grew again in the neon fusion.
Spent nine nights bleeding in a confessional,
to sacrifice myself to myself;
the whole time the priest sharpened
his teeth,

Panel 3.

just like the gods, alone in dark rooms,
bare bulbs burned out from the blowback
of orgiastic creation. They covet
each others' toys. Every time
I am born, a god
goes supernova. No. Every time
a god eats a gun and bursts
to infinite energy, I am delivered

Panel 4.

from the womb of a star. Deities sin,
and I am hell
for gods.

Splash Page.

Look, *He shakes*
his whiskey tumbler the lake of fire.

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Vita

Christian Coleman is a poet preoccupied with mythology, superheroes, and the fall of the Roman Republic.